

My response to your Strategic Review of Digital Communication is mainly coloured by the failure of the East Sussex Rural Broadband Programme.

As you are no doubt aware this programme was launched in 2010 specifically to address the issue of "rural and remote areas of the country should benefit from this infrastructure upgrade at the same time as more populated areas, ensuring that an acceptable level of broadband is delivered to those parts of the country that are currently excluded." Peter Jones, leader of East Sussex County Council, said in 2011 "I also want to ensure that our rural areas and other parts of the county that could be hard to reach – where many of our small businesses are located – will be on the priority list for this upgrade."

I am apparently a resident that is "hard to reach" – absolute nonsense, I live in a small rural village in East Sussex in the South of England, not on a remote island, on top of a mountain or in a ravine. The reason why I am hard to reach – and have a fairly consistent broadband speed of download 0.97Mbps and upload 0.38Mbps (using a wired connection, wi-fi for me is useless) – is that I live too far away from the BT cabinet, which has had fibre installed. My question to both Central Government and East Sussex County Council is why on earth you went ahead and let BT install this programme that has meant that over one third of rural residents will not improve broadband speeds, in fact, they may decrease due to other "lucky" rural residents being able to access faster broadband and bandwidth being decreased for the likes of me.

All BT, with the agreement of East Sussex County Council, have done is to run fibre to the cabinets and only the residents living near the cabinets have benefitted from this. The rest of us have apparently "just got to get along with it."

On a professional level, as a Parish Clerk, for two small rural parishes, I "run" two rural businesses.

- All information from both County and District Authorities comes via email, as does other information from various parties.
- Responses to both County and District Authorities must be made via email.
- Small Parish Councils must now have a website and submit financial information (Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities) and agenda/minutes/information on their websites.
- I have no choice but to send my salary information to HMRC via their RTI system, every 15th of the month I await with great trepidation – will the information go through the first time – NEVER! Two/three/four times – hopefully it's got there.
- On trying to access a website, I usually get the text only and the graphics are shown as blue boxes with a white cross in it – reminds me of the 1980's.
- The work above adds around 2/3 hours to my working week, due to slow/not getting at any broadband.

On a personal level, I am disenfranchised, due to

- Not being able to access (unless with great difficulty and time wasted), as many do, such things as Netflix, Amazon Prime, iTunes, TV/Radio catch up et al. I am very upset that I cannot access such sites, as most do, I would like the choice.

On a personal level, the failure of the Rural Broadband Programme, has again disenfranchised me and costs me money.

- I decided to leave BT about 18 months ago, due to their appalling customer service. I tried Sky, Talk Talk etc., nobody would touch me due to my slow broadband speeds.
- The only company that would consider my contract was Plusnet (a company owned by BT). In all honesty, I have to say that they were very up front with the broadband speed they could provide, and I have found them to be helpful and professional (unlike BT).
- The media and internet are awash with offers of free broadband/landlines etc., for a year – unfortunately I cannot take any of these offers up as Sky etc., will not consider me.

Benefits/or not to East Sussex

- Our rural villages in East Sussex desperately need young families to move here. Looking at my teenage grandchildren – good broadband speeds are definitely an issue regarding location. Youngsters need good access to the internet for education and relaxation, this is a real issue.

- Residents in East Sussex running businesses from home/other properties. I do not see how you can convince anyone, such as me, to set up a small business with the appalling broadband speed I current can access.

ESCC Solutions

- At one point, node technology was considered – I am not network expert – but I understood that this would mean nodes on the telegraph poles with fibre, enabling residents too far from the cabinet to access faster broadband. This seems to have died the death (too expensive?).
- ESCC are now talking about satellite access for residents like me, DEFINITELY NOT A SOLUTION. Satellite broadband is very expensive, has latency and download issues. Why should I have to have a second-rate system.

Recommendations to come out of this review

- Get rid of the ridiculous 2Mps target, we should be looking at least 100Mps nationwide.
- Priority must be given to those like me “hard to reach,” before any further monies are spent.
- Make BT accountable and make them have let other providers access their network, cabinets etc.

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